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AUTHOR Winborn, John Douglas
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ABSTRACT

Lack of proper discipline in schools has long been a major concern of the public. Proposals on how to improve discipline have ranged from the bizarre to the cruel. Educators and administrators must devise alternative punishments to replace traditional methods, such as corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion, that are frequently ineffective. One such alternative is Saturday School. Saturday School programs have included such features as physical labor, academic work, counseling, and a detention atmosphere. A Saturday School program was implemented at Franklin Junior High School, Franklin, Tennessee, after discipline problems worsened. Students had to arrive on time, write an essay on discipline, do academic exercises, and participate in behavior-improvement activities. A statistical analysis done over 4 school years found significant differences in comparisons of data on the socioeconomic status, race, and gender of Saturday School students. During the test period, Saturday School helped reduce suspensions, and expulsions were infrequent. There was also a significant drop in the use of corporal punishment, which had been used frequently at the school. Saturday School may be an acceptable alternative to more harmful disciplinary practices. It also may be a step toward developing more internal rather than external student control methods. (Contains 10 references.) (JPT)

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A Study of the Effectiveness of a Saturday School in Reducing Suspension, Expulsion and Corporal Punishment

John Douglas Winborn

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Introduction

Discipline in schools has been a high priority issue for many years as confirmed in the Twenty-third Gallup poll of the public's attitude toward public schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1991). Items polled such as drug use, lack of discipline and school funding have tied as the most frequently mentioned problems. From 1981 to 1991, the category labeled Lack of proper discipline has consistently ranked among the top concerns among all school conditions considered.

Responses to disciplinary problems have been as diverse as the behaviors warranting correction through action on the part of teachers and administrators. Violence, vandalism, unproductive and off-task behavior, absenteeism and truancy are among the items of conduct that have required intervention or correction (Duke & Jones, 1984). Corrective techniques have ranged from bizarre methods described by Hyman (Hyman, 1990) to physically and emotionally cruel methods (Hyman, 1990; Greven, 1990).

One of the challenges for educators and educational administrators has been to develop techniques of punishment that will effectively serve to correct misbehavior. Traditionally accepted methods such as corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion have emerged as techniques that are frequently ineffective (Henson, 1986; Pinnell, 1985). In some instances the punishments (such as suspension) have

been identified as more a reward than a punishment for misbehavior (Rudolph, 1984).

One of the alternative punishment techniques that has emerged in schools is the Saturday School. Disciplinary Saturday Schools were first seen in public schools in the early 1980s and became publicized in the 1985 film The Breakfast Club. Saturday School procedures have been variable according to individual school need and philosophy. Some Saturday Schools have been established as a cost-effective method of dealing with suspensions and averting loss of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funds (Adams, 1986; Keifer, 1980).

Activities that took place during Saturday School included performing physical labor (Hagerty, 1988), academic work combined with counseling to avert further misbehavior (Stessman, 1985) and a detention atmosphere with little intervention of the part of the Saturday School monitor other than being certain that participants are awake and carrying out some task (Mickler & Martin, 1989). It was consistently found that Saturday Schools took place on Saturday mornings and lasted three to four hours.

Description of the Saturday School

The setting for this study was Franklin Junior High School, Franklin, Tennessee. There was an increase in

incidents of corporal punishments and suspensions in the 1989-90 school year. The principal decided that some alternative intervention had to be implemented. A program was created to assist at-risk students called Students At Risk Extended Day (SARED). The SARED program provided assistance to at-risk students in behavior monitoring in the schools setting and counseling to assist in decision making when away from the school. Since it was anticipated that students considered at-risk would also be subject to punishment for some behaviors, the administration of the Saturday School program was placed under the jurisdiction of SARED.

Saturday School at Franklin Junior High School (FJHS) was held in the training classroom of the Franklin Police Department. This facility was close enough to FJHS so as not to create an undue burden on parents and students in attending Saturday School. Use of the police department also eliminated schedule conflicts with the junior high building as the facility was heavily used by the school and community for various Saturday activities. Saturday School teachers were present at 8:00 a.m. to prepare to receive students from 8:15 until 8:30. Students were expected to be present from 8:30 until 11:30 a.m. although students arriving up to 8:35 were admitted. Students arriving after 8:35 were not permitted to enter that session and were reassigned to another Saturday School session.

Students were assigned to Saturday School by the principal or assistant principal, not by classroom teachers. Parents were contacted when their child was assigned to Saturday School so that necessary arrangements could be made to insure attendance.

While present in a Saturday School session, students responded in writing to a question pertaining to why they were assigned to Saturday School and how they might avoid repeating the offense that resulted in this punishment. Upon completion of this task, assignments were given to the students by the Saturday School teachers in Math, Tennessee History, World Geography and Citizenship. The academic work phase of Saturday School occupied the first two hours of the session. The third hour was devoted to presentation of behavior improvement information in the form of worksheets, discussions, role-playing or viewing a video.

Students were not permitted to talk during the sessions. Restroom breaks were taken once every hour and students were accompanied to and from restrooms and drinking fountains by one of the Saturday School teachers. Dismissal took place promptly at 11:30 a.m. Teachers remained on duty until 12:00 p.m. to insure that all students had departed safely.

Description of the Study

The years considered for this study ranged from the 1987-88 through the 1990-91 school years. The 1990-91

school year is the one in which the Saturday School added to the school discipline plan. A comparison was made of cases of suspension, expulsion and corporal punishment in the years considered. In addition to these three punishment variables, consideration was given to whether Saturday School assignments occurred more often among male students compared to female students, whether students of a lower socioeconomic status were assigned more often that those of a higher socioeconomic status, and whether black students were punished more often than white students.

Method

Data for analysis was obtained from the school records of FJHS for the years indicated. Suspension and expulsion data were obtained from the Superintendents Annual Report of Suspensions and Expulsions. The source of corporal punishment data was written records required to be kept by classroom teachers and administrators. Socioeconomic status was established through determination of free and reduced lunch data. Data pertaining to gender, race and socioeconomic status was exclusive to the 1990-91 school year. Assignments to Saturday School were obtained from the records kept by teachers and administrators who were involved in the Saturday School program.

Statistical consideration of gender and race data of Saturday School participants was accomplished through use of

the pooling of proportions test. The chi-square statistical procedure was used to analyze data applicable to socioeconomic status, suspension, expulsion and corporal punishment. Null hypotheses were formed for each of the variables. In all cases a level of significance of $p < .05$ was used.

Results

106 students were assigned to Saturday School in the 1990-91 school year. 57 (54%) were male and 49 (46%) female. The pooling of proportions difference in male to female Saturday School assignments was .61124 standard deviations from a mean that represented no difference based on gender. In this case $p = .27$, indicating that there was no statistically significant difference in assignment to Saturday School based on gender.

63 (59%) of the students assigned to Saturday School were black and 43 (41%) were white. Using the pooling of proportions analysis in this case resulted in a 9.355 difference between the groups. This represents 9.355 standard deviations from a mean that represents no difference between the groups and translates into a $p = .00$.

31 students assigned to Saturday School were of a lower socioeconomic status whereas 75 students were not of a lower socioeconomic status. The chi-square result for these data was 5.78, $p = .017$. These data were recognized as

significant indicating that there was a statistically significant difference in the number of students assigned to Saturday School based on socioeconomic status.

Suspensions occurred in the following frequencies: 1987-88 - 58 (18.1%), 1988-89 - 55 (17.2%), 1989-90 - 167 (52.2%), 1990-91 - 40 (12.5).

These data were analyzed using the chi-square statistic resulting in a chi-square value of 123.99 with 3 degrees of freedom and $p = .00$.

There were only two cases of expulsion in the 1987-88 school year. No other cases occurred in any of the years studied. Due to this lack of data, a statistical analysis of this variable was not possible.

Incidents of corporal punishment occurred in the following frequencies: 1987-88 - 187 (27.5%), 1988-89 - 212 (30.1%), 1989-90 - 250 (32.1%), 1990-91 - 57 (7.5%).

These data were analyzed using the chi-square statistic resulting in a chi-square value of 158.63 with 3 degrees of freedom and $p = .00$.

Summary and Conclusion

Statistical analyses demonstrated no significant difference in the use of Saturday School to punish students based on gender. Significant differences were found in cases of comparisons of socioeconomic status and race. Of these demographic variables applicable to the Saturday

School students studied, the results of the gender analysis were the most significant.

Considering the pooling of proportions result pertaining to the race variable, there is an indication that the impact of this punishment upon black students is extreme. This is consistent with findings in other forms of punishment and is another indicator of the need for investigation and intervention with respect to punishment excesses carried out against minority students.

Data analyzed pertaining to suspension indicated that the Saturday School had a positive effect on reduction of the number of suspensions. However, the year that created the level of significance was the 1989-90 school year in which 167 suspensions occurred. While the 1990-91 school year showed a lower number of suspensions than any other, the level of significance was a result of the extreme number of suspensions in 1989-90.

A result that may be looked upon as positive is the inability to analyze the expulsion variable due to a lack of data. The infrequency of expulsions is a favorable indicator of the discipline plan of the school studied as virtually all of the literature identifies expulsion as an extreme measure that is seldom beneficial to the student expelled or the school that must resort to expulsion.

Corporal punishment has become a questionable method of enforcing discipline. There is a movement away from the use

of this method as evidenced by the number of states in the United States that are banning its use (Hyman, 1990). Given the historically high levels of use of corporal punishment at this school, the year Saturday School was implemented becomes a landmark as a dramatic drop in frequencies of this method of punishment coincides with its adoption. Taking the statistical analysis into account, there is little room for doubt that Saturday School played a significant role in reducing corporal punishment.

There are several positive indicators that emerge in this study of the merits of including a Saturday School as a part of a school discipline plan. Reducing suspension and corporal punishment are examples of the benefits of such a program. Unfortunately, Saturday School along with the practices that Saturday School may appear to replace are external forces that must be thrust upon students in order to punish for misbehavior. While Saturday School may appear to be an acceptable alternative to more harmful practices, it may also be looked upon as a step toward development and adoption of disciplinary methods that foster internal rather than external control of students.

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